



Springfield officials, organizations seek to create cultural district downtown to enhance attractions, new venues

Springfield City Hall etc 2012.jpg

Springfield Symphony Hall, at left, is part of a proposal to created a cultural district downtown. City Hall is to the right of the Campanile. *(John Suchocki / The Republican file)*

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SPRINGFIELD — Many local officials and organizations are hoping to create a state-recognized cultural district in **downtown Springfield** to promote its attractions ranging from the Springfield Museums to Symphony Hall, and to expand and strengthen opportunities.

Kateri Walsh

City Councilor **Kateri B. Walsh** and **Springfield Museums** Vice-President Kay Simpson said Friday that the advance support has been strong. An application for the official designation may be submitted by Aug. 15, to the **Massachusetts Cultural Council**.

"Receiving a state-designated cultural district will position downtown Springfield as an area of uncommon distinction with museums, concert halls, art galleries, studios, theaters and a college," Simpson said. "The goal is to provide a cultural environment that merges the historical and diverse cultural elements of Springfield into a welcoming experience for residents of the city and visitors from throughout the Commonwealth."

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The **City Council** is expected to consider giving its approval for the application at the council's next regular meeting, July 15.

Walsh, who is chairwoman of the council's Maintenance and Development Committee, has scheduled a committee meeting on Wednesday at 5 p.m., at City Hall, to discuss the cultural district and answer any questions or concerns. The public is encouraged to attend.

The proposed cultural district would be bordered by East Columbus Avenue, Bliss Street, Stockbridge Street, High Street, Federal Street, Pearl Street, Dwight Street, Lyman Street and Frank B. Murray Street, according to a prepared summary.

Walsh said the targeted area “is a distinctive area to begin with.”

“This reinforces how unique what we have is – the Quadrangle, the Springfield Armory, and combines it all together acting as one to apply for grants and to enhance programming,” Walsh said.

The application for the cultural district designation is the result of the collective efforts of the Cultural Coordination Committee, chaired by David Starr, president of The Republican. The committee includes representatives from various downtown and cultural organizations, all working in tandem with the city on the cultural district project, also working with groups such as DevelopSpringfield and the Chamber of Commerce.

The plans, if approved, would including hiring a full-time district director, funded by the Business Improvement District and other private fund-raising efforts, officials said. Activities could include public art, festivals, concerts, art-related classes, rehearsals, and vendors, demonstrations, exhibitions and walking tours.

The Armory Quadrangle Civic Association, a downtown organization, recently voted to endorse the cultural district application following a meeting between the association and cultural district advocates.

Institutions within the cultural district will include the Springfield Symphony Orchestra, the Springfield Armory National Historic Site, Springfield Museums, Community Music School, CityStage, Springfield City Library, Springfield Technical Community College and WGBY as well as the MassMutual Center, and Paramount Theater, along with various art and musical attractions, major landmarks on the African-American Freedom Trail, and historic residential neighborhoods.

The stated goals of the district include attracting artists and cultural enterprises, encouraging business and job creation, establishing the district as a tourist destination, preserving and reusing historic buildings.

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